

CD 2011--71



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

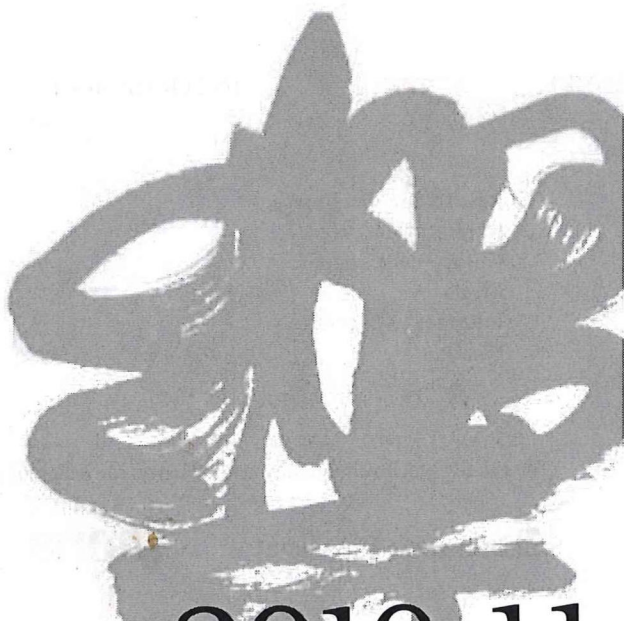
David Briskin, conductor

Christopher Hwang, cello

Saturday, April 9, 2011

7:30 p.m. MacMillan Theatre

Edward Johnson Building



2010-11

A joyous music season

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
David Briskin, conductor

PROGRAM

Carnival Overture, Op 92

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Chunying Chu, graduate conductor

Cello Concerto No. 1, in E-flat, Op. 107

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Allegretto
Moderato -
Cadenza -
Allegro con moto

Christopher Hwang, cello

INTERMISSION

Concerto for Orchestra

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Introduzione
Giuoco delle coppie
Elegia
Intermezzo interrotto
Finale

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Program Notes

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Carnival Overture, Op. 92 (1891)

In 1891, at the age of 50 and at the peak of his fame, Dvořák wrote a trio of concert overtures that he called his 'Triple Overture.' Initially sharing the same opus number, Op. 91, the three overtures are united by the theme of Nature and the human experience and he gave them the titles *Nature, Life, and Love* (*Příroda, Život a Láska*). These were the first stand-alone, programmatic concert overtures that Dvořák had written in a genre by now well established by his fellow-countryman Smetana, following the lead of Berlioz and Liszt. Even as he wrote the overtures, between March 1891 and January the following year, Dvořák was negotiating a contract as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York. He conducted the première of the triptych as he said farewell to Prague, on April 28, 1892, and conducted a second performance on October 21 later that year in New York's Carnegie Hall.

With eight of his nine symphonies entering the repertoire of orchestras across Europe, Dvořák's command of the orchestral resources in the overtures is confident. But his choice of titles for the set was less assured. The central overture, designed to embody *Life* soon became *Bohemian Carnival*, eventually telescoped to just *Carnival* when the work was published as an independent overture, with its own opus number. Dvořák described the overture as 'merry' when writing to his publisher and presents an exuberant carnival atmosphere from the start. The program underlying the overture, he said, represents "a lonely wanderer reaching a town at dusk, where a fair is in full swing. On every side the sounds of instruments are heard, mingled with cries of joy and the unrestrained gaiety of people giving vent to their feelings in songs and dances." The atmosphere becomes calmer and more nocturnal. In what English writer Alec Robertson describes as 'an

unblushing visit to [Wagner's] Venusberg,' a pair of lovers (flute and cor anglais) stray away from the crowd for a little quality time. A brief, falling, pastoral theme on clarinet, echoed a few moments later on cor anglais, is a motto theme that unites the three overtures. It started life as the opening theme of the first overture, now titled *In Nature's Realm* and was described thus in a program note authorised by Dvořák for the New York première: "This theme recurs with the insistence of the inevitable personal note marking the reflections of a humble individual who observes and is moved by the manifold signs of the unchangeable laws of the universe." The carnival atmosphere returns and resoundingly concludes an overture that has become the composer's most played.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975) **Cello Concerto No. 1, in E-flat, Op. 107 (1959)**

"I took a simple little theme and tried to develop it," Shostakovich is reported as saying after Rostropovich first played through the concerto for him at his dacha outside Leningrad. That 'simple little theme' evolved into one of the landmark works of the repertoire, custom made for the soul, personality and technique of a soloist who was to virtually 'own' the work for half a century. The spiky four-note theme determinedly dominates the opening movement, animates an extended cadenza and crowns the driven finale. Rostropovich had hoped for a concerto from his former composition teacher for well over a decade. The two musicians had performed many recitals and toured together. But the cellist was 37, with an acclaimed international career, when he first read of the existence of the concerto in the press. It took him all of three days to memorize its pages before playing it through for the composer, prior to giving the première. It was to be the first of several important works that Shostakovich

was to write for Rostropovich and his wife, soprano Galina Vishnevskaya.

Both composer and soloist have acknowledged the importance of Prokofiev's *Symphony-Concerto* (1952) as inspiration for the new work. "Whole sections of the piece (admittedly much transformed) found their way into Shostakovich's work," Rostropovich said. Both scores have a prominent role for timpani. But there is one notable difference between the two works. Shostakovich scores his concerto very sparingly, writing not for full orchestra, but for a smaller combination of strings plus two each of the woodwinds (with doubling piccolo and contrabassoon parts), timpani, celesta and a brass section of just one horn. His score is lean, compact and economical. The celesta is heard just once, while the horn at times functions as a shadow soloist.

The four-note G-E-B-Bflat motif is introduced right away by the solo cello. Shostakovich described the music that follows as 'in the style of a jocular march.' But the development of this music is hard-driven and unremitting, with chattering woodwinds that bite rather than smile. At times the theme is squeezed into C-B-Eflat-D, which is a variant of Shostakovich's four-note signature (D-S-C-H) that regularly appears in his late music. The prominent rhythm of two short notes and one long that underlies both the main theme and the chant-like second theme is to be echoed in the finale in a sardonic passage that quotes Stalin's favourite song, *Suliko*. Stalin, dead six years when the concerto first saw light of day, left behind a malign legacy that fuelled Shostakovich's wry humour and feeling for the sardonic for the rest of his life. The ensuing three movements are played without break. First comes the slow movement, by far the longest movement in the concerto. Its noble, somewhat melancholy opening, in a Sarabande-like rhythm that Shostakovich favoured, recurs to bind together the three sections of the movement. Then the cello ruminates on a poignant, folk-like melody. In one of the most memorable moments of the concerto, it reappears towards the end

of the *Moderato* as a ghostly echo of itself, high and otherworldly on cello harmonics, answered by celesta. The cadenza then meditates on the musical material we have just heard, increasing in intensity and complexity as fragments of the concerto's opening theme reappear. This leads directly into the finale whose angry cries and relentless drive is combined with the opening theme, resounding on the horn. The cello pushes on to even more frenzied territory until the timpani bring the proceedings to a decisive conclusion.

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

Concerto for orchestra, BB 123
(1943, rev. 1945)

"Through working on this concerto, I have discovered the wonder drug I needed to bring about my own cure," Bartók said, somewhat optimistically, to a friend in 1943, not long after the première of the *Concerto for orchestra*. "I was almost unaware, at the time, that it was happening." After looking after his dying mother in Hungary as World War Two was breaking out, Bartók had arrived in New York in the fall of 1940 to face what would turn into three years of creative drought. Then, with a small suitcase representing his entire life's creative work stashed with friends in Switzerland, with no royalties or pension coming from Europe, with a small grant from Columbia University and the proceeds of lectures at Harvard now dried up, the beginning of 1943 saw the 62 year-old composer admitted to hospital in a state of physical collapse, weighing just 87 lbs. The American Society of Composers, Artists and Publishers (ASCAP) looked after his medical bills, while Serge Koussevitzky brought artistic nourishment in the form of a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra for a full-scale symphonic work. Once an initial reluctance to accept charity had been satisfied, Bartók began work at a sanatorium in up-state New York. Here, at Saranac Lake, in a little more than seven weeks, he created a masterpiece that would bring him the widest audience of any of

his works. It was also to turn out to be the work that would provide many music-lovers with a 'way-in' to Bartók's less immediately approachable scores.

Its title had precedents in recent works by Hindemith and his colleague Kodály. The idea of a concerto for orchestra may also have been kick-started by his new publisher, Ralph Hawkes, who had suggested a series of concertos for various featured instruments, after the manner of Bach's *Brandenburg* Concertos. But, at heart, the concept was original to Bartók and he felt exhilarated. "The title of the symphony-like orchestral work is explained by the tendency to treat the single instrument or instrument groups in a 'concertante' or soloistic manner," he wrote in a brief program note for the first performance. "The virtuoso treatment appears, for instance, in the *fugato* sections of the development of the first movement (brass instruments), or in the *perpetuum mobile*-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and especially in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages." The overall shape of the piece is structured into Bartók's favoured five-movement arch shape. The main argument is carried in the first and last movements, framing a less intense second and fourth – a Scherzo and Intermezzo respectively – which in turn enclose a central movement, a haunting movement which carries much of the emotional weight. Bartók put it this way: "The general mood of the work represents – apart from the jesting second movement – a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third movement to the life-assertion of the last one."

The compact opening movement follows a largely traditional sonata structure. It is preceded by an introduction which establishes the interval of a fourth and, to a lesser degree, the major second, – often derived from or resembling the East European folk music that Bartók had absorbed for three decades – as a key building

block of both the melody and harmony of the concerto. There is a distinctive *fugato* development of the themes for both brass and strings. The *Giuoco delle coppie* second movement could be translated as "Game of Pairs" and focuses in turn on five pairs of instruments, each with its own interval and melodic ideas. The bassoons are in sixths, the oboes in thirds, the two clarinets in sevenths, the flutes in fifths, and muted trumpets in seconds, each accompanied by strings and side-drum. A brass chorale leads to an extension of the idea. Much of the *Elegia* further develops the rising fourths of the Introduction, now in Bartók's night-music idiom – 'a misty texture of rudimentary motives' is how he put it – punctuated by impassioned orchestral declamations. Next comes the *Intermezzo interrotto*, an "Interrupted Intermezzo," where the interruption is provided by an episode parodying the march from Shostakovich's *Leningrad* symphony which, according to the composer's son, Bartók heard on the radio and disliked. The *Concerto* finale is an visceral, fugal, sonata-form moto-perpetuo which draws much of its thematic energy from Romanian folk music. It's also one of the most brilliant orchestral showpieces in the repertoire.

From the first performance on, audiences and critics alike were enthusiastic about the new concerto. But Bartók did not have long to enjoy either his 'wonder drug' or the renewed creative life it brought. He did complete the Sonata for solo violin for Yehudi Menuhin and the best part of the Third Piano Concerto for his wife. But an incomplete Viola Concerto for William Primrose and sketches for a Seventh string quartet were left behind at his death in 1945 as proof that what his wife Dita referred to as Bartók's "under-no-circumstances-will-I-write-any-new-work" attitude had gone. Leukaemia and tuberculosis prevented Bartók from being seen again publicly after the première of the *Concerto*.

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Comments: klnotes@sympatico.ca

Biographies

A conductor renowned for the versatility of his repertoire and the depth of his musical interpretations, **DAVID BRISKIN** has been the Music Director and Principal Conductor of The National Ballet of Canada since 2006. In July 2008, he was appointed Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music and Conductor of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Prior to his appointment with the National Ballet, Mr. Briskin served as conductor with American Ballet Theatre for seven years, leading performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York's City Center and in major opera houses throughout the world. Mr. Briskin is a regular guest conductor with the New York City Ballet and San Francisco Ballet and has appeared with numerous ballet and modern dance companies throughout North America.

In addition to his work in dance, Mr. Briskin has enjoyed great success on the concert stage. He has conducted the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Syracuse, Akron, Cincinnati Pops, and Singapore Symphony Orchestras; the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Juilliard Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica where he conducted the Latin American premiere of John Corigliano's monumental First Symphony. Equally at home in the opera house, Mr. Briskin's opera schedule has taken him throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe, including performances of *La Bohème* in Italy; with the Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Columbus, New England Conservatory, Sarasota Opera, and Lake George Opera. For six years he served as the Music Director of the Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra, conducting annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall.

Raised outside of Boston, he attended the Indiana University School of Music and received a Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a Master's degree from Queens College, City University of New York.

Born in Guelph, Ontario, cellist **CHRISTOPHER HWANG** began his cell studies at age three. He is the recipient of numerous grants, scholarships and awards at provincial and national music competitions, including the Kiwanis Music Festival and the Canadian Music Competition, both as a soloist and a chamber musician. A member of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Christopher has been a member of the Kitchener-Waterloo Youth Orchestra and the National Youth Orchestra of Canada in the summers of 2004 and 2006. In addition, he has performed as soloist with the Kitchener-Waterloo Youth Orchestra at the Centre of Squares in 2004. Christopher has attended such summer festivals as the Southern Ontario Suzuki Institute, Southern Ontario Chamber Music Institute, Toronto Summer Music Association Festival, Morningside Music Bridge and Banff Centre residencies in orchestra, chamber music and master class. Outside of his studies, he has been active as a teacher at the Yamaha School of Music this past year. He is finishing his bachelor's degree in performance at the University of Toronto studying with Shauna Rolston.

Born in Taiwan, conductor **CHUNYING CHU** is currently in the second year of her master's degree in performance at the University of Toronto specializing in orchestral conducting, studying with David Briskin. Chunying earned her bachelor's degree in piano performance at the Schulich School of Music at McGill University, where she also studied choral and orchestral conducting with Iwan Edwards. She also studied orchestral conducting with Helene Gagne and served as assistant conductor for Concordia University Orchestra. In 2008, Chunying also trained and conducted the Shi-Pai amateur church choir in Taiwan, regularly performing in music festivals and concerts throughout Taiwan. Ms. Chu's engagements this season include several appearances with the U of T Symphony Orchestra and the U of T Concert Orchestra.

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